

# NRCS NEWS RELEASE

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## **50,000 ACRES ENROLLED IN WETLANDS PROGRAM** *Enrollment Part of Presidential Initiative*

**ST. PAUL, MN, MAY 15, 2006**—USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Bruce Knight announced today that over 50,000 acres of wetlands in Minnesota have been enrolled in the national Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). The announcement was made at a celebration held at the property of Paula and Ranjit Bhagyam near Albert Lea, Minnesota. Today's announcement represents a portion of the nearly 500,000 acres that have been enrolled in wetland restoration projects since 1994, in Minnesota, making it one of the premier states in the nation in restoration activities.

"Milestones such as this achievement demonstrate the power and benefits of cooperative conservation," said Knight. "Agricultural wetlands provide some of the best filters of nutrients for waterways, leading to healthier cleaner water."

On Earth Day 2004, President Bush announced a new strategy for increasing wetland acres and established an aggressive new national goal—moving beyond the "no net loss" of wetlands to have an overall increase of wetlands each year. The President's goal is to create, improve, and protect at least three million wetland acres over the next five years. WRP is the leading wetlands program for this initiative.

WRP is the Nation's premier private lands wetland restoration program. It is a voluntary program that offers landowners the means and the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. Wetlands are some of the most productive and dynamic habitats in the world and are vital to the overall health of the environment. Wetlands store surface and subsurface water, improve water quality, cycle nutrients, remove particulates, maintain plant and animal habitat, filter and purify water, and recharge groundwater. NRCS manages WRP and provides technical and financial support for landowners who participate in the program.

The Bhagyam's have 175.2 acres enrolled in WRP and have achieved several conservation outcomes through the program. This wetland and associated upland restoration, like all WRP sites in Minnesota, have produced or contributed to a healthier environment. In Minnesota, partners such as the Board of Water and Soil Resources, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Ducks Unlimited, Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCMR), Minnesota Waterfowl Association, U.S.

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Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and Pheasants Forever, and others each play a significant role in conservation of our natural resources.

Students from Glenville-Emmons and Sibley elementary schools participated in today's 50,000-acre milestone event by participating in several environmental learning stations and installing wood duck nesting boxes. Learning in an outdoor classroom setting such as the WRP site near Albert Lea provides hands on opportunities for children to learn by doing.

Minnesota NRCS has 493 separate WRP contracts with 416 landowners on 57,970 acres in 53 Minnesota counties, ranging from Houston County in the Southeast corner of the state to Lake of the Woods County in the Northwest corner of the state. NRCS has easements as small as 1 acre in size to as large as 4300 acres in size. Overall, NRCS has invested \$58 million to acquire WRP easements and has budgeted over \$21 million for wetland restoration efforts.

For information about the WRP in Minnesota, please visit our website at:  
<http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp/index.html>

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